

# Are Academics Relevant in the Digital Age?

## (Perspectives from Art & Design)

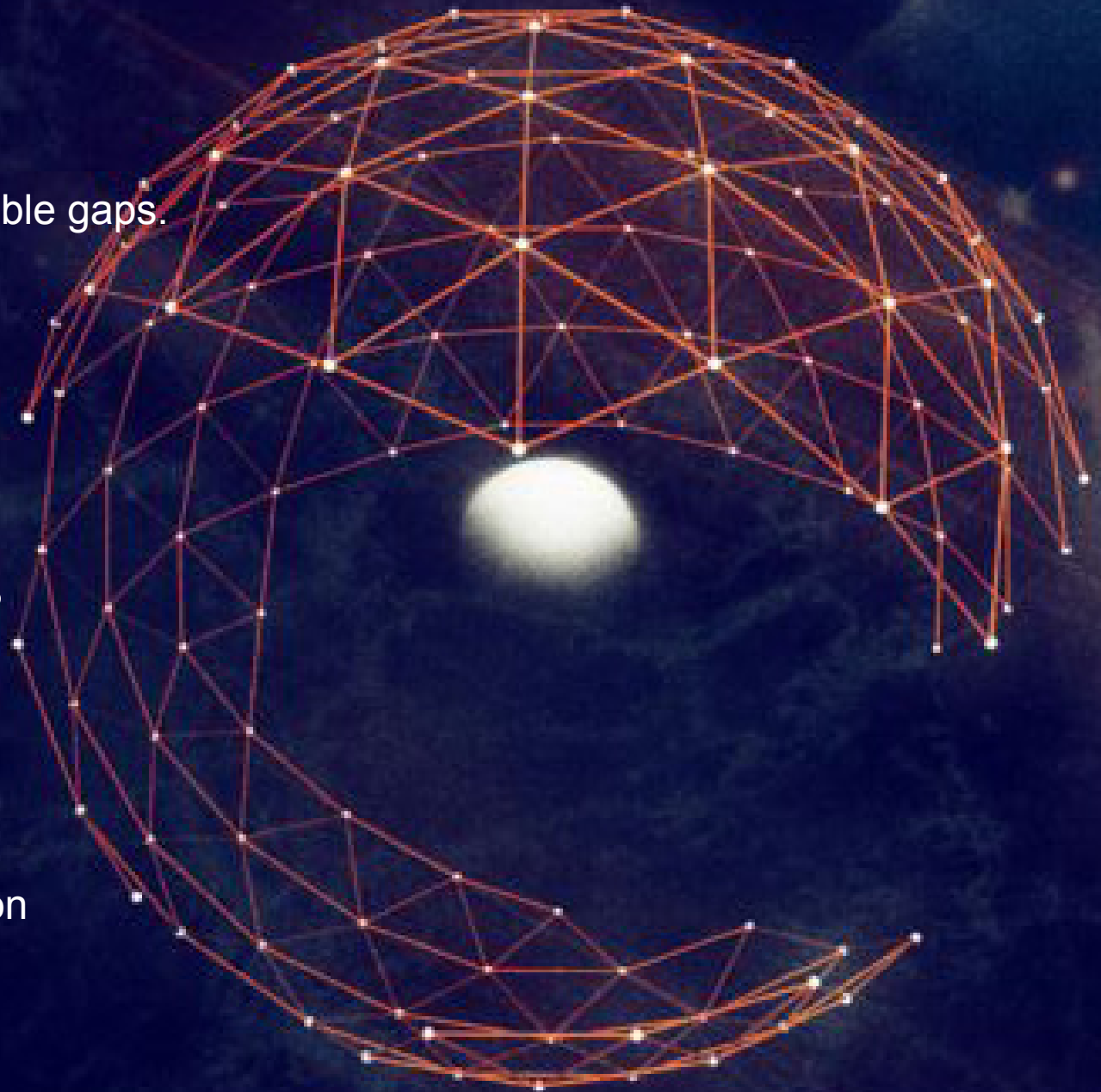


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# Overview

- Pinky Bazaz - a bit about me
- Designer to Academic and the visible gaps.
- Higher Education Now
- The Changing Digital Landscape
- Who are the Digital Natives?
- How are Digital Natives Learning?
- The changing role of academics
- Can digital help bridge the gap?
- To Stay Relevant Disrupt Education





# **Pinky Bazaz | Designer | Practitioner | Academic**

**Fashion Designer**

**Childrenswear Designer**

**Laser Artist**

**Eyewear Designer**

**Corporatewear Designer**

## **Move to education**

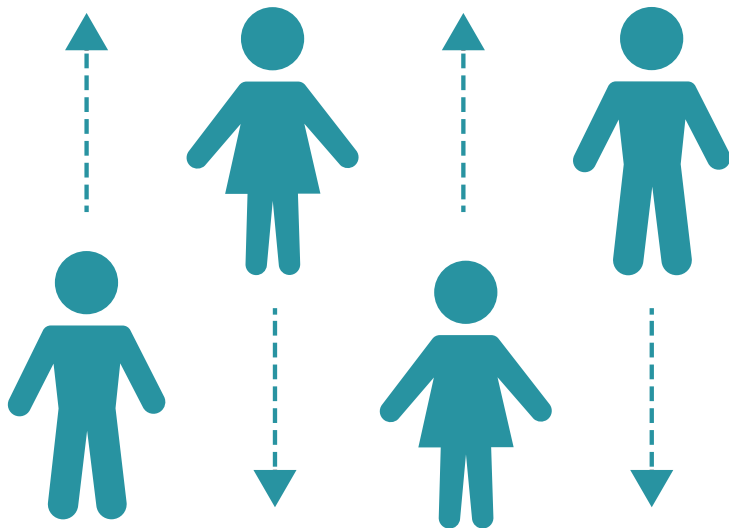
- **To share my industry knowledge and experience**
- **To give myself a new challenge**
- **Moving from selling (industry) to teaching**
- **To re-engage with academia and to pursue a PhD**

## **Designer to Academic and the visible gaps.**

- **Misaligned education outcomes which need to align to industry expectations; in particular what is expected of the student and their skill base.**
- **Often graduates are not confident in their own knowledge or ability and are unable to apply what they have learnt outside of an academic scenario without guidance.**
- **Students are taught techniques and practical skills rather than building how to create and identify new knowledge through critical thinking.**
- **Students lack the ability to present their work with conviction.**

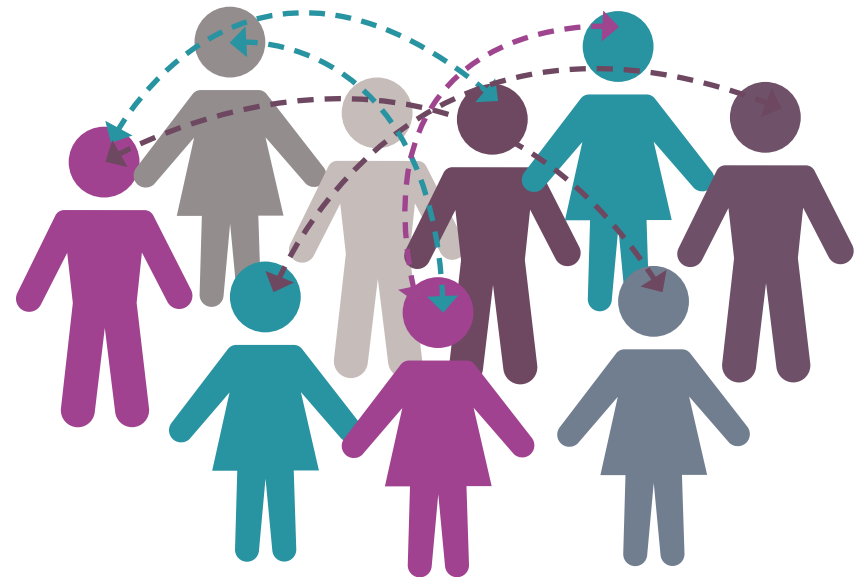
## Higher Education Community of individuals

- Academics could be thought of as digital immigrants or digital aliens
- Professional freedom, leaves room for variable teaching methods
- Knowledge created it often shared through a linear process
- Behaviours of departments or faculties can be insular
- Academics can be protective of their research and individualistic
- The common goal is not always the priority



## Creative Industry Connected Community

- Shared knowledge to creative new knowledge
- Creative hubs reflect industry behaviour
- Have a shared goal or vision, usually achieved through a common practice
- Shrewd cut throat environment.
- 'Get things done' attitude with a focus on teamwork





# The Changing Digital Landscape

- 1 — We live in a global design industry
- 2 — Growing connected world with digitally advanced environments
- 3 — Moving to global creative studio

- 1 — Digital social communities
- 2 — Continual technological advancements
- 3 — Digitally reliant



# Who are the Digital Natives?

“Generation Y - born between 1980-2000 form the main body of the term Digital Natives  
Generation X - born prior to 1980 are known as the Digital Immigrants.  
(Prensky, 2001)

- Immersed into a digital social world which spans connects their *personal lives* and *professional lives*
- Digitally reliant and expect things to quicker and more efficient.
  - Shopping behaviour - *see it - like it - buy it*
  - Knowledge - *question - google it - find the answer*
  - 24/7 Connectivity - *emails - social media - smart-phones*

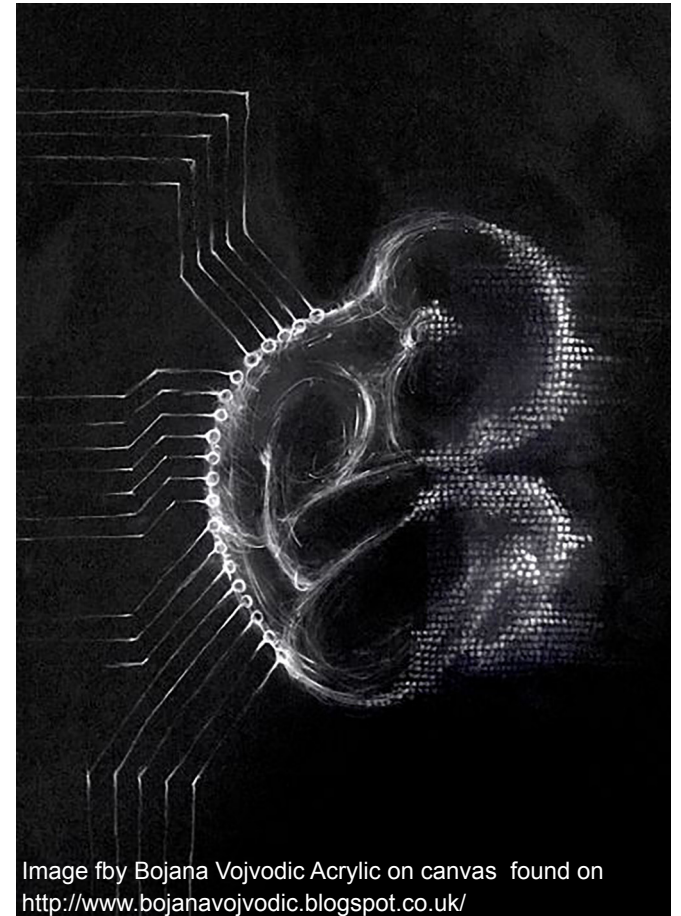


Image fby Bojana Vojvodic Acrylic on canvas found on <http://www.bojanavojvodic.blogspot.co.uk/>



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  - 24/7 Connectivity - ***emails - social media - smart-phones***
- ***Digital Jugglers*** - who are used to multi-tasking across a number of different platforms (Selwyn, 2009)
  - Often creative outside of education building blogs/ businesses/online presence
- A generation of digital learners where ***each cohorts' digital experience surpasses the next.*** (Richtel, 2010)
- Dave White argues natives are not natural but rather exist as ***digital residents and visitors*** (White, D. Wild, J. 2014)

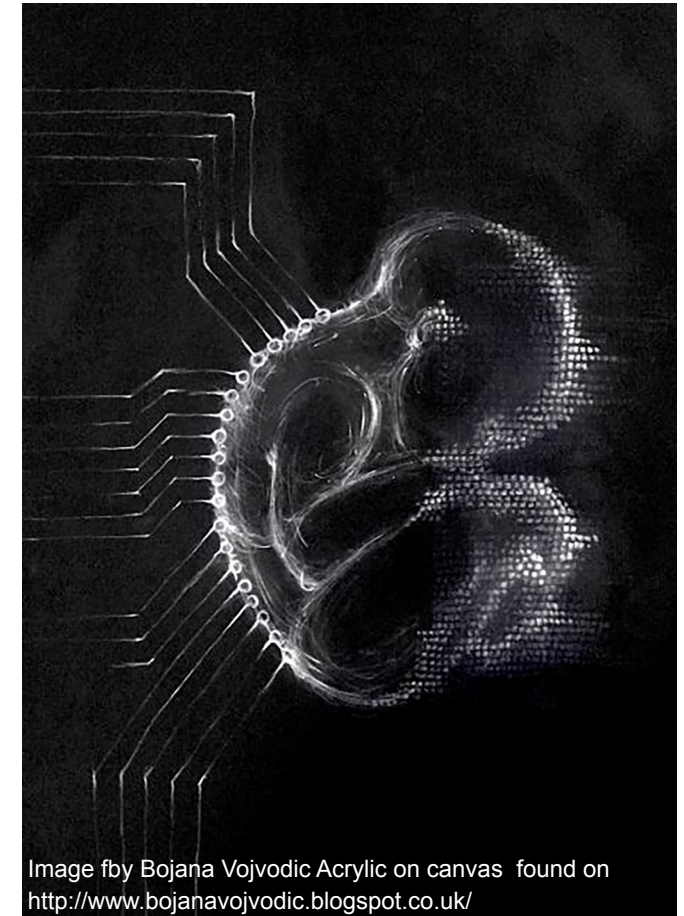


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**“...have an innate confidence in using new technologies”  
(Selwyn, 2009, p365)**



## How do they learn?



Image from | <http://www.tomsguide.fr/article/brouilleur-ondes-3G-GSM-smartphone,2-896-6.html>

# This is an information rich but time poor world!

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- They are **active learners** - not passive learners.
  - Engage in independent learning to enhance their skill set - online tutorials, creative hubs and forums.
  - Students learn in modes they are comfortable with. (Fearn, 2008)
- They are **not 'single' skill focused** and enjoy learning and engaging with new technology. (Dean, 2015)
  - The creative industry is equally as multifaceted
  - Can academics cater to this?
- Exposed to and consume vast amounts of **information in a single click**.
  - Access to an abundance of knowledge
  - Process information exceptionally fast - according to Volker they are expert information skimmers (Volker, 2010)
- However is all of this information skimming **superficial learning**? (Helding 2011)
  - In one year (2008) the average person consumes three times the amount of information as a person would in 1960.
  - Do students have a comprehensive understanding of what it means to be digitally literate?
- The growth of the **knowledge economy** and the need to create new knowledge (Nesta, 2015).



The digital age is still very much in its infancy and if we intend to stay relevant we need to grow with it.

# The Changing Role of Academics

## Academics can be:

- Scared or weary of digital technology
- Students can often do it faster if not better than academics.

*Students can become frustrated by an academics lack of digital knowledge.*

## Traditional Pedagogical Approaches

- Master and Apprentice (Souleles, 2013)
  - Expert skills are passed on - but how often do the skills progress?
  - Which skills are truly being developed?
  - Do the skill sets match with what the creative industry is looking for
- Sitting by Nellie (Swann, as cited by Souleles 2013)
  - Mimicking expert opinion rather than developing independent authority
- University's are traditionally very insular and conservative. An open collective environment struggle to exist outside of departments or faculties.



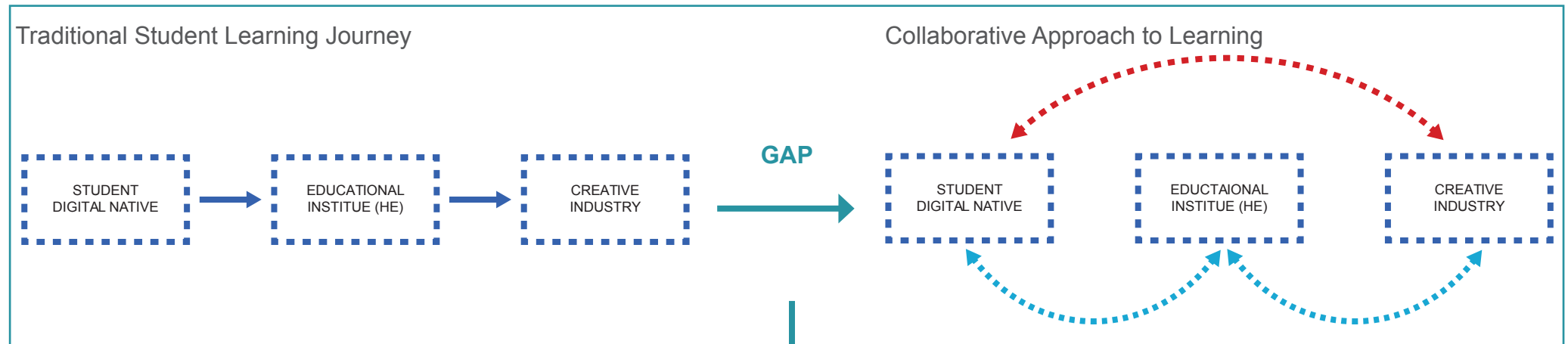
Image by Merve Ozaslan, Natural Act Collection  
from | <https://www.behance.net/merveozaslan>

**Many of today's design graduates, whilst having the theoretical knowledge of their field of studies; there is most certainly a wide gap between their theoretical understanding and practical/industry knowledge** (Micky AMS Clothing Director)



# HE Educational Set Up

Through the process of adapting teaching approaches and utilising creative communities and digital technologies we can aim to foster key future skill sets.



Diagram, Bazaz (2016)

in 2015	in 2020
1. Complex Problem Solving	1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Coordinating with Others	2. Critical Thinking
3. People Management	3. Creativity
4. Critical Thinking	4. People Management
5. Negotiation	5. Coordinating with Others
6. Quality Control	6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Service Orientation	7. Judgment and Decision Making
8. Judgment and Decision Making	8. Service Orientation
9. Active Listening	9. Negotiation
10. Creativity	10. Cognitive Flexibility

Image Adapted from the Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum (2016)

# Can digital help to bridge the gap?

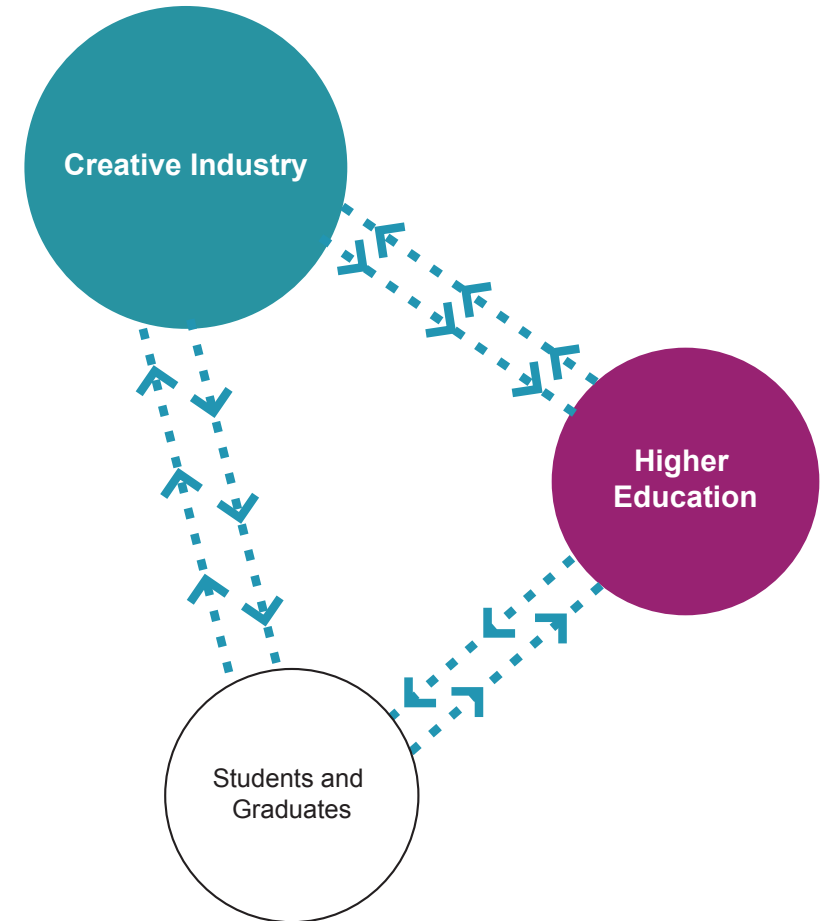
Digital technology is the enabler of the growth of a connected community, which will;

- **Emulate the creative industries** behaviour
- Open up new and **multidisciplinary connections**
- **Connect**, practitioners, educators and students

Within my own teaching experience students engage less with the Virtual Learning Environment than they do with social media.

- Students are more likely to use familiar platforms and engage with information.
- Universal form of communication.

**“...they are built to create communities by open, often informal socialising and this is a strength universities could take advantage of.”** (Bazaz,2016)



Diagram, Bazaz (2016)

## So are academics relevant?

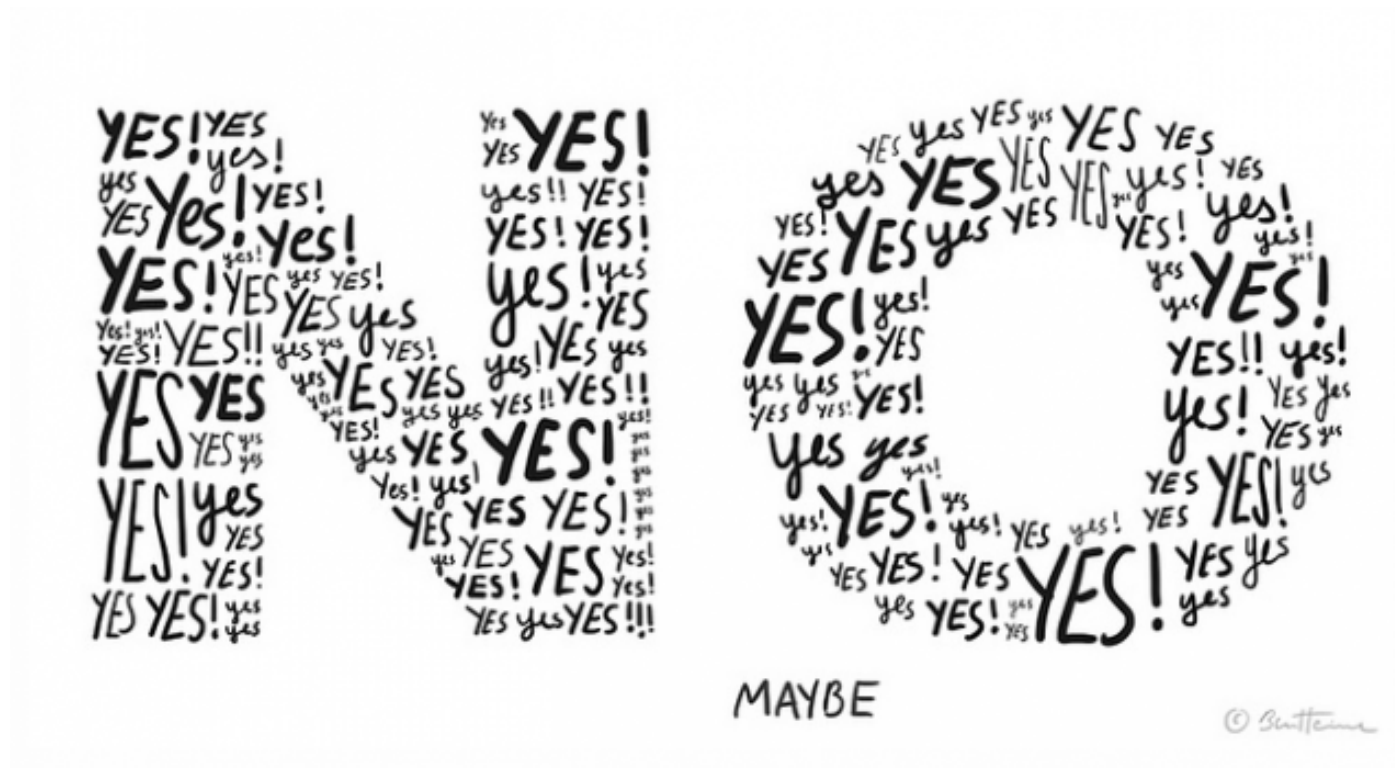


Image by Ben Heine from <http://www.adverblog.com/2011/10/09/no-if-we-are-honest/>

The long and short of it, yes and no.



# In Conclusion...To Stay Relevant Disrupt Education

We need to be different and think differently. Our students are consumers who need an experiential education which meets their demands and suits their digitally connected lifestyles.

- ***Decentralised and collaborative learning***

- Connecting with different departments and across institutions

- Flexible and independent learning

- Offer expert guidance

- Facilitating new knowledge rather than being the masters of old.

- ***Creating a global studio*** (GHASSAN, A, & BOHEMIA, E (2015))

- Collaborative economy both with industry and students

- Continuous learning

- Open knowledge clusters

- ***We need to stay relevant to stop students by-passing academia.***

- Integrate digital technology into our teaching

- Collaborate and co-create with digital natives

- Integrate contemporary digital technology into the student learning journey

**“If you do what you always do you’ve always done you’ll always get what you always got.”**

Henry Ford as cited by Shayler (2013)

**Thank You**

**Any Questions?**

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